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PSYCHOLOGY

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL ADAPTATION
OF MEDICAL STUDENTS FROM INDIA IN UKRAINE

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Abstract. *International students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience personal and academic challenges when studying health sciences in Ukraine. Moving from one academic environment to another and relocating to a new country to study is becoming an increasingly common occurrence. As well as providing cultural and intellectual enrichment, this experience also presents challenges and difficulties. With the increasing number of international students in Ukraine, an understanding of the psychological factors that facilitate adaptation is becoming evermore important. The aim of the present research was to consider elements facilitating or impeding Indian international students' adaptation to Ukraine. The variables of trait-anxiety, attachment intimacy and attachment anxiety, psychological distress, satisfaction with social support, and cultural identification were measured. Attachment intimacy and trait-anxiety moderated by psychological distress were found to be relevant to the process of adaptation. Co-national identification was also relevant to adaptation for the Indian students.*

Keywords: *sociocultural adaptation, psychological distress, foreign students*

Introduction. While the transition from high school to university is frequently a part of young adults' life trajectories, studying abroad is increasingly becoming a common experience for young adults as well. Although these experiences are often (rightly) assumed to provide cultural and intellectual enrichment, successful adaptation to a new university and to a new country requires effort and flexibility. In addition to the general life and academic stresses experienced by all university students, international students also deal with challenges related to cultural transition. Although many IS complete their studies with relatively few difficulties, others experience problems such as insufficient linguistic skills, homesickness and loneliness. In fact, there is extensive research on the factors and processes that facilitate or impede their psychological, social, cultural, and academic adaptation. The examination of acculturation and its outcome, adaptation, has been the focus of much research in the cross-cultural literature. Acculturation refers to the cultural and psychological changes that result from the contact between cultural group. Researchers have drawn a distinction between psychological(emotional/affective) adaptation and sociocultural (behavioral) adaptation. Psychological adaptation can be understood within a stress and coping model and refers to feelings of well-being or satisfaction with transitions, although it is commonly evaluated through negative affect, using measures of depression or mood disturbance. Sociocultural adaptation can be understood within the social learning paradigm and refers to how well an acculturating individual is able to manage day to day life in the new cultural context. Psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation are inter-related but conceptually and empirically distinct. The former is predicted by personality variables, life changes and social support; the latter, by cultural distance, cultural identity, language ability, and cultural knowledge.

Material and methods. This aim of the present study was to examine the relations between anxious personality, dimensions of adult attachment, satisfaction with social support, cultural identification, and psychological distress with the sociocultural adaptation of medical students from India in Ukraine.

Students were recruited through the university social network and mailing list. Additionally, Indian students were contacted during tutorial classes.

Results and discussion. The present study has shed some light on the adaptation of students by comparing samples of international (Indian) and domestic students in Ukraine. The study examined two broad sets of variables which, it was suggested, would predict the adaptation of students in a new sociocultural environment. The first set includes dispositional variables, such as facets of personality and adult attachment as well as psychological distress. The second consists of more contextual variables, like satisfaction with social support and cultural identification. There are clear similarities between the two final models; there are also differences, as would be anticipated given that the constructs measured were not identical. This suggests that there are important differences in the process of adaptation for domestic and international students. Other groups of international students, in other cultural contexts might vary again, but the important basic point is that the experience of adaptation is different for international and domestic students and that researchers and educators should be aware of this. Attachment anxiety and intimacy were also related inversely in both cases and attachment intimacy also directly predicted sociocultural adaptation to the new environment in both cases, which was not anticipated. This indicates that those with highly

anxious personalities are more likely to develop anxiety about abandonment and also report high psychological distress. Furthermore, those with highly anxious personalities are less likely to develop attachment intimacy, which involves an acceptance of closeness and trust in the dependability of others. Some of these relationships have clear theoretical plausibility (anxiety as a trait will lead both to specific anxieties and to distress). Also across both groups, those higher in trait-anxiety reported to have more difficulty adapting to their new environment, through the moderator of attachment intimacy. In other words, those who were more anxious were less likely to seek intimacy, and those who sought less intimacy adapted less well. Again this is entirely plausible. To adapt to a new social context one must be prepared to engage with it, the closer the better, and if anxiety prevents this, then it hinders adaptation. It is an empirical question whether this is a general process, but it is common to both groups, which commends it as a hypothesis at this stage, particularly as attachment dimensions have not been linked with sociocultural adaptation before, to our knowledge.

Conclusions. In sum, in the present study we examined the sociocultural adaptation of domestic and international students using sociocultural factors within the acculturation literature (e.g. in group and outgroup social support and ethnic and national identification) and personality variables within the developmental literature (e.g. trait-anxiety and attachment dimensions). Our results indicate that sociocultural adaptation is predicted both by attachment intimacy and ethnic identification. One distinctive aspect of the acculturation model in our study is the use of psychological distress not as an outcome but as a predictor of sociocultural adaptation of students. An unanticipated, but important finding is the direct link, for both groups, between intimacy seeking as a facet of attachment dimensions and sociocultural adaptation.

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